

# Canadian Parental Attitudes on Infant Sleep Training: A

## Qualitative Secondary Analysis of Data.

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### BACKGROUND

- Sleep training is any behavioural intervention parents use to increase infant sleep duration through the night and aid in the “extinction” of night wakes that require a parental response<sup>4</sup>.
- The three general categories of extinction-based sleep training methods include<sup>3</sup>:
  - Extinction (e.g., the “cry-it-out” method)
  - Graduated extinction (e.g., the “5-10-15 minute check-ins” method)
  - Extinction with presence (e.g., the “camping-out” method)
- Sleep training is controversial because some parents believe that it is detrimental for parent-infant attachment while others believe that learning to self-soothe is a critical infant milestone<sup>6</sup>.
- The literature suggests no long-term effect of sleep training on parent-child attachment or infant health, sleep, or development<sup>5,6</sup>.
- Research has found that sleep training improves infant sleep and parental well-being when implemented after the infant is 6 months old, which aligns with Perinatal Services BC’s safe sleep guidelines to reduce Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)<sup>2,4,6</sup>.

### OBJECTIVE

- The purpose of our study was to investigate the attitudes of Canadian parents of infants between 6 and 18 months of age regarding sleep training.

### METHODS

- The data utilized in this study was collected for an ongoing study about parental nighttime infant care behaviours and family sleep and wellbeing.
- Through a larger cross-sectional survey, parents were asked if they would be interested in participating in an online dyadic interview that would delve more in-depth into their sleep routines and division of care amongst the couple.
- Recruitment was conducted online via community outreach, social media call-outs, and emailing lists of companies targeted at parents of infants.
- Inclusion criteria:** Parents of 6-18 month old healthy, singleton infants living in Canada.
- Interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams from May 2023 to October 2023.
- The transcripts from interview recordings were de-identified and used to analyze parental attitudes on sleep training qualitatively using MAXQDA.

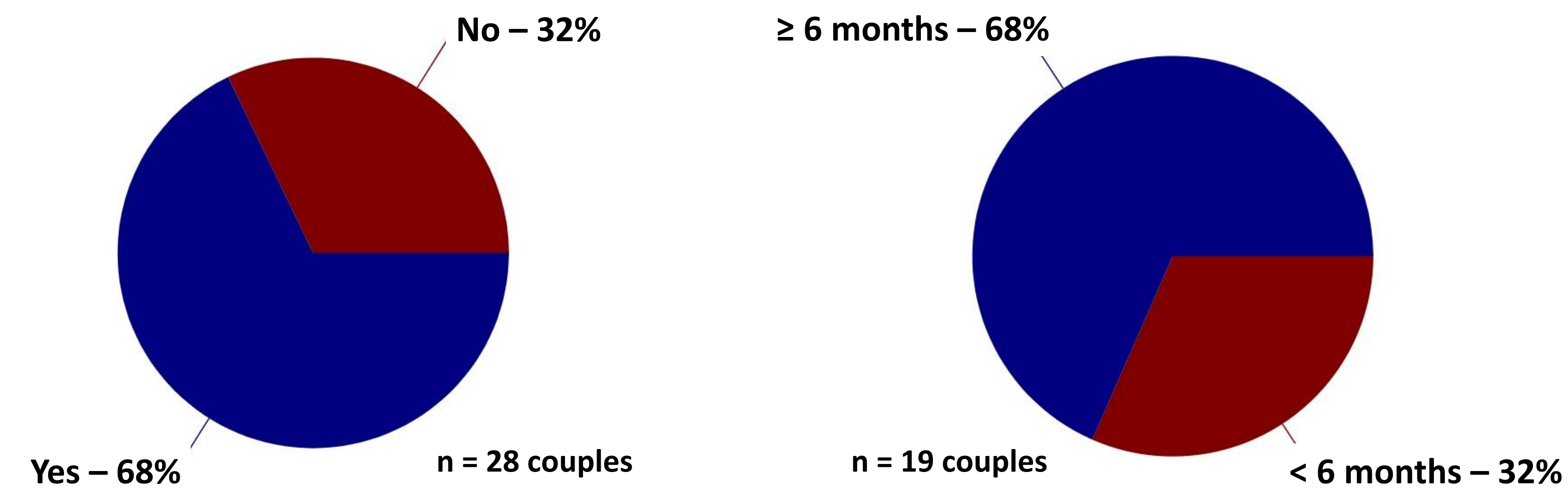
### RESULTS

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1. Study Sample Demographics

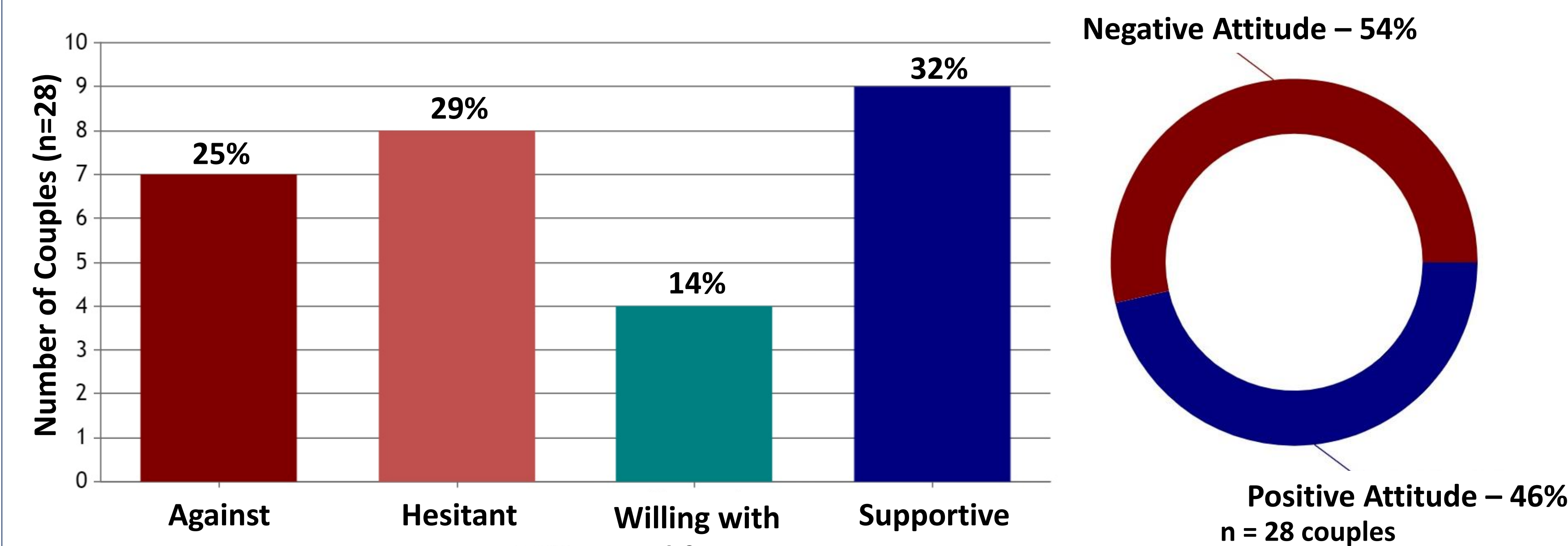
Characteristic	Mean/N, Range/%
Parental Age (years)	34.6 (26-48)
Infant age at time of interview (months)	12.7 (7-20)
Orientation	Number/N, Proportion/%
Heterosexual	21 (75%)
LGBTQIA2+	7 (25%)

#### PREVALENCE OF SLEEP TRAINING & INFANT AGE AT IMPLEMENTATION

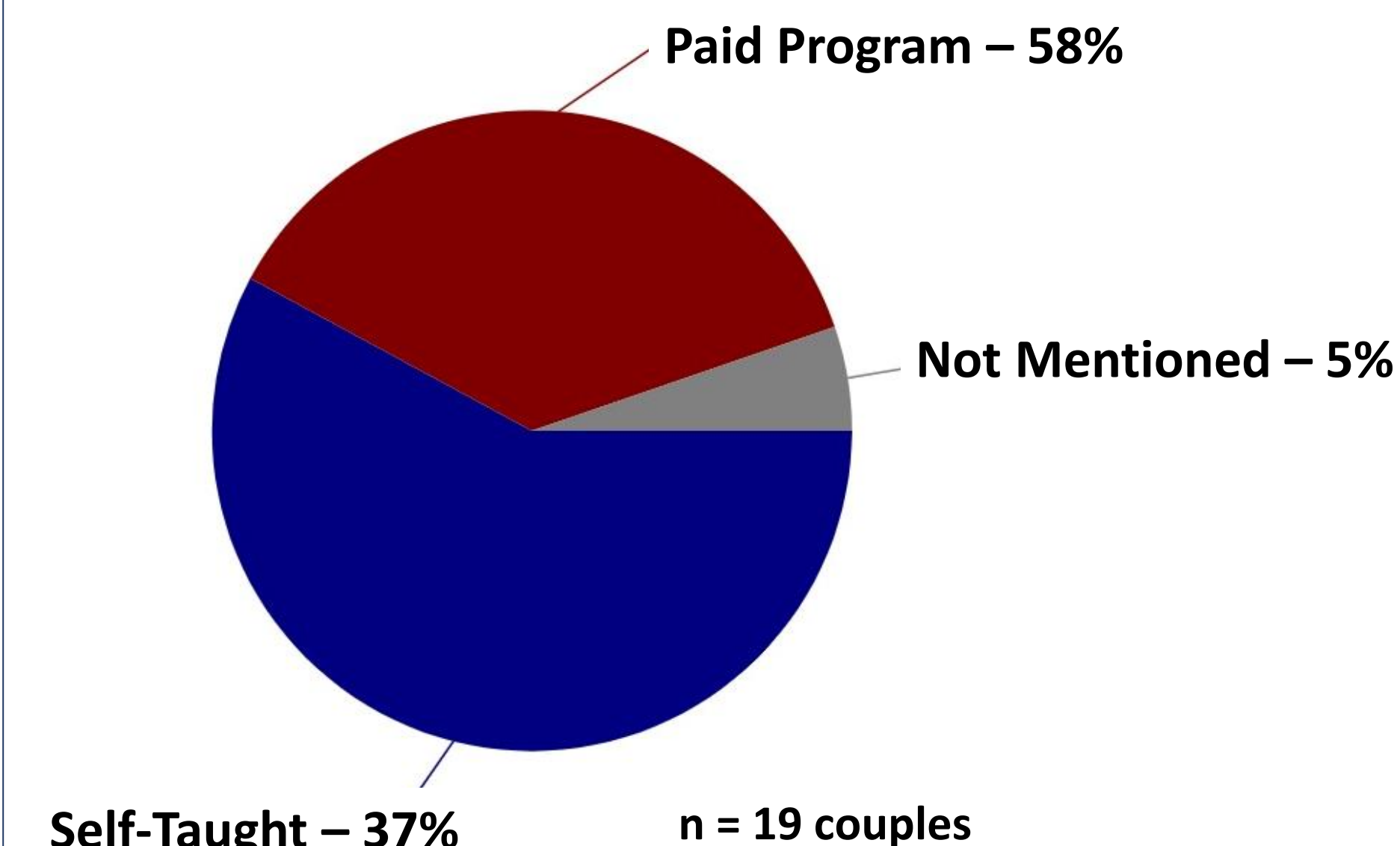


Of N = 28 couples (n = 28), 19 (68%) couples implemented sleep training and 9 (32%) couples opted out of sleep training their baby. Of the N = 19 couples who sleep trained, 6 (32%) couples began before the recommended 6 months of age, and 13 (68%) couples began at six months or older. The average age of implementation was 6.5 (SD = 2.6, range 2-13) months.

#### PARENTAL ATTITUDES ON SLEEP TRAINING



#### COMMERCIAL SLEEP TRAINING PROGRAM USE



Of the N = 19 couples who implemented sleep training, 11 (58%) couples were self-taught through resources, such as books, online material, smartphone applications, social media, and family and friends. as their resource for sleep training information. 7 (37%) couples relied on paid programs and sleep consultants as their resource for sleep training information. 1 (5%) of the couples did not mention their resource for sleep training information.

### RESULTS - QUALITATIVE

#### Parents Against Sleep Training:

“Just so brutal... What it was about it that bothered me... [was] having sort of like a visceral reaction to hearing a child cry it out.”

#### Parents Hesitant to Sleep Train:

“It was just a try anything at this point, because we've already exhausted everything, including ourselves. So we just... Whatever it was, just try it, cause something's gotta work.”

#### Parents Modifying Traditional Sleep Training:

“The “camp-it-out” method... was a lot nicer than the fuss-it-out or the cry-it-out – that just worked for us because I couldn't handle him screaming...”

#### Parents Supporting Sleep Training:

“the sleep training is definitely a controversial topic. But for us, it was like life changing... But after we did the sleep training, it was a total 180 in his sleep... So, we would be advocates for it.”

### CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- Modern Canadian parents with infants have diverse, polarizing opinions on sleep training.
- The perceived risks of sleep training often dictate parental attitudes.
- Sleep training is often perceived as harmful, and these parents will opt out of sleep training, to the detriment of their mental and physical health<sup>1</sup>.
- Some parents rely on paid programs for sleep training guidance, but parents should know that baby sleep consultants and programs are unregulated<sup>4</sup>.
- Healthy, rested parents will be more present and emotionally available than tired parents and will be better able to care for and create a safe sleep environment for the baby<sup>1</sup>.
- Being aware of public perception and common misconceptions helps health professionals make empathetic, research-based recommendations to new parents.

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